



the Pelican

Lahontan Audubon Society • P.O. Box 2304 • Reno, Nevada 89505 • www.nevadaudubon.org • 775-324-BIRD

Mission statement: To preserve and improve the remaining habitat of birds and other wildlife, restore historical habitat, and educate the public, with emphasis on children, providing vision to all about our unique Nevada environments.

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2007

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Membership

*Submissions for the January/
February issue are due Dec. 1, 2007*

MONTHLY MEETINGS

Date: Fourth Tuesday of the month
Time: Social at 6:30 p.m. Program starts at 7 p.m.
Location: South Valleys Library
15650A Wedge Parkway, Reno
Exterior door, west side of building

Directions to South Valleys Library: Take Hwy 395 to the Mt. Rose Hwy. Head west on the Mt. Rose Hwy and take the first right turn onto Wedge Parkway, just past Raley's shopping center. Go about one mile on Wedge Parkway and look for the boldly designed, mustard yellow library on the right.

November 27, 2007 - From Black Gold to the Black Oystercatcher: Challenges and Opportunities in Alaska

Taldi Walter, Alaska Field Coordinator for the National Audubon Society, will present an informative slideshow showcasing some of the important natural areas and brilliant birds found in wild Alaska. Her presentation will explore some of Alaska's natural treasures set aside decades ago for the benefit of wildlife and the American public. She will highlight the imminent and compelling challenges and opportunities facing the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, Tongass National Forest, Chugach National Forest, and National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska. Come and enjoy a virtual tour of the more than 600,000 sq. miles of rugged mountains, grinding glaciers, endless tundra, diverse temperate rainforest, and winding coast lines that constitute the largest of our states, often referred to as the "the last frontier." Taldi will also discuss the work National Audubon is doing to seek a balance between resource extraction and protecting internationally critical habitat.

Note: There is no meeting in December. The next meeting after November is Tuesday, January 22, 2008.

Birds & Books (Sundance Bookstore, 7-8:30 p.m.)

November 20

The Birds of Heaven: Travels With Cranes, Peter Matthiessen

December 18

The Grail Bird: Hot on the Trail of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker, Tim Gallagher

FIELD TRIPS

Christiane Omer
Janet Hudson

775-354-2634
775-303-1541

happycpo@aol.com
cookiejargirl@yahoo.com

Field trips are free to Audubon members and non-members. Birders of all skills levels are encouraged to participate. Trips are subject to change or cancellation; please pre-register with field trip leaders. Pre-registration provides leaders with contact information so the leaders can reach you in the event of trip changes or cancellations. Remember to dress for the weather and bring something to eat and drink. For additional information, please view the Lahontan Audubon Society website at www.nevadaaudubon.org, or contact Field Trip Coordinator Christiane Omer.

Saturday, November 3 Damonte Ranch Wetlands

Time: 8 a.m.

Leader: Kathy Oakes (775) 747-5446
oakesy@sbcglobal.net

We will meet at the Jack in the Box in the Damonte Ranch Shopping Center. Coming from I-395 south, take the Damonte Ranch Parkway exit (#59), turn right (you will be going west), then turn right into the shopping center. The Jack in the Box will be on your left. We will carpool from there to the wetlands. (If you reach South Virginia Street, you've gone too far.) Bring binoculars and a spotting scope if you have one, and extra clothes for unpredictable weather. Prepare to be out until mid-day. This is an easy walk on paved trails and birders of all experience are welcome. It will be a good opportunity to see the wetlands created as part of the subdivision development in this area. Hopefully, we

will see a few late fall migrants and resident birds of wetlands and open meadows.

Saturday, November 10 Sierra Valley Expedition

Time: 8 a.m.

Leader: Alan Gubanich (775) 857-0191
aag@unr.nevada.edu

We'll spend both morning and part of the afternoon looking for any early wintering raptors (Red-tailed, Rough-legged and Ferruginous Hawks) plus early winter waterfowl (swans, ducks and geese). We can brown-bag our lunch, or enjoy a great little restaurant in Sierraville (let me know your preference when you contact me). If time and weather permit, we may also visit Yuba Pass or Plumas-Eureka State Park. In the eastern Sierras chickadees, nuthatches, jays, woodpeckers and sapsuckers are always possibilities. Please contact Alan beforehand if you plan to attend. Meet in the McDonald's parking lot, Lemmon Valley exit (Exit 74), north of Reno off Hwy 395.

Saturday, November 17 Sparks/Spanish Springs

Time: 8:30 a.m.

Leader: Christiane Omer (775)354-2634
happycpo@aol.com

We'll spend a few hours observing birdlife around Red Hawk Golf Course. There are usually large numbers of wintering ducks in the wetlands and it's a great place to learn their field marks, or photograph them. The golf course is

also home to raptors, sparrows, and the usual suspects. Storms have blown in all sorts of surprises during the past few years; our species list is up to 104, and might be higher if I were a better birder! We can get hot drinks and/or lunch at David's Grill after our walk. The golf course is off limits to pedestrian traffic, even on the cart trails, so please be respectful of that rule. You will learn the paths that are okay to walk anytime. Wear boots and expect a leisurely mile or two walk depending on conditions and desires. Birders of all levels are welcome, but group size is limited, so please call for reservations and directions to meeting place.

Field Trip Reports

Oxbow, September 15

Leader: Dave Jickling

About 20 people showed up for a leisurely two hour stroll along the Truckee River at the Oxbow Nature Study Area. The morning started a little cool but soon heated up as we watched a Northern Flicker, Hairy Woodpecker and Downy Woodpecker all in the same cottonwood trees. A large flock of migrating swallows flew high over our heads as we got wonderful looks at a pair of immature Cooper's Hawks that were "playing" with each other, chasing about through the tress. Later one of the pair perched just 30 feet off the trail and posed patiently for us, giving plenty of viewing time and lots of picture taking opportunities. All in all a fine day for a bird walk with 26 species seen or heard.

(More Field Trip Reports on Page 5)

SUBSCRIPTIONS

The Pelican is the official newsletter of the Lahontan Audubon Society and is published six times annually. Subscriptions are paid for as part of the dues of LAS or the National Audubon Society. LAS welcomes gifts, donations, and bequests in general, or gifts in honor or memory of relatives and friends. Such donations will be used as specified or, if unspecified, will be used to support LAS education and conservation projects. All donations are tax deductible.

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Toll-free: 1-866-736-7343

Senator John Ensign
400 S. Virginia St. #738
Reno, NV 89501
Reno phone: 775-686-5770

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400 S. Virginia St. #502
Reno, NV 89501
Reno phone: 775-686-5760

Governor Jim Gibbons
101 N. Carson St.
Carson City, NV 89710
775-684-5670

IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS PROGRAM

Robin Powell

775-247-2798

rpowell@audubon.org

The World of Quaking Aspens

The quaking aspens are reminding us that autumn is upon us with the small patches of golden hues popping out from the surrounding conifer trees and streaming down the mountainsides of Nevada. Quaking aspens are some of my favorite trees for a multitude of reasons and the sight of them always brings a smile to my face. I am fortunate that many of the IBAs possess aspen habitats which allow me to work in such a beautiful environment.

Quaking (or Trembling) aspen (*Populus tremuloides*) are the most widely distributed trees in North America but provide relatively little coverage throughout the landscape. Aspen are typically associated with rich, moist soils. Aspens are prolific seed producers; however, seed germination is extremely rare due to the specific combination of environmental conditions. The primary method for reproduction is through asexual root sprouting (ramets or sucker) which are genetically identical (clones) of the parent root system. After several years, the ramets will break off and develop their own root system. This method of reproduction allows the aspen to establish quickly in disturbed areas, such as areas impacted by wildfires. Aspen are highly adaptable to environmental conditions but are short lived--less than 150 years).

Another interesting aspect of aspen is the high level of ecological diversity within aspen habitats. In fact, the biodiversity of aspen

habitats are only second to riparian areas. Small aspen stands serve as “oases” for various plant and wildlife species with the lush understory providing a major source of forage and microhabitats for wildlife, particularly birds. Aspen areas have a higher species richness and abundance of insects which increases the forage potential for birds. Older aspen trees are more susceptible to stem decay which makes them attractive to cavity nesting birds. Some bird species, such as Red-naped Sapsucker, will create cavities in healthy aspen trees which also creates nesting sites for secondary nesters. Other bird species associated with aspen woodlands include Warbling Vireo, Black-capped Chickadee, Orange-crowned and MacGillivray’s Warbler, Western Wood Peewee, and Dusky Flycatcher.

Aspen habitats are considered to be on the decline in the Intermountain West due to a variety of natural and anthropogenic factors. Climate change (drought conditions), grazing, conifer encroachment, and the disruption of the natural disturbance events, are detrimentally impacting the aspen groves.

☉ *Natural Disturbance Events:* Aspen are stimulated by the removal of mature overstory and disturbance to the root system. The warming of the soil also increases hormone (cytokinins) production and increases root growth. The absence of disturbance stifles growth and regeneration. Excessive fire

management can prevent the natural disturbance events, like wildfire, from occurring.

- ☉ *Conifer encroachment:* Conifers can block sunlight from filtering to the aspen suckers and prevent the warming of the soil. Aspen are highly shade intolerant.
- ☉ *Grazing:* The foliage, twigs, and bark are highly palatable to large ungulates (deer, elk, and cattle). The increased herd populations have put stress on the aspen.

Aspen are unique and are considered a “keystone” species in that aspen plays a critical role in supporting the entire ecosystem. There are increased efforts in the conservation community to protect these vital areas from further degradation. The NV IBA Program will be participating in the conservation effort for the preservation and conservation of the aspen woodlands because of their aesthetic and biodiversity values.

—Robin Powell
Nevada Director of
Bird Conservation

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S PERCH

The Age of Aquarius ...

... the Water Bearer. Now come we all bearing water, convenient, tasty, healthy, chic, perchance emblematic of social status. What a curious species we are. We have succumbed to marketing over reason. With each innocuous personalized plastic bottle of water, consider:

- in 2006 Americans spent an estimated \$11 billion drinking 8.3 billion gallons of bottled water, nearly 10% increases over the prior year
- American municipalities spend billions bringing clean, cheap water to the public in an environmentally efficient manner, subjecting it to hundreds of thousands of quality tests
- the EPA regulates the quality of public water supplies, it has no authority over bottled water; FDA regulation, only for interstate transactions, is subject to a weaker regulatory framework
- at least 40% of bottled water comes from municipal water supplies
- the taste of tap water in America has repeatedly prevailed in blind taste tests
- bottled water costs from 240 to 10,000 times as much as water straight from the tap
- the price of a gallon of bottled water equates to \$7.50 to \$11 a gallon
- 1.5 million barrels of crude oil are used each year to manufacture plastic water bottles for U.S. consumers, enough to generate electricity for more than 250,000 homes for a year
- manufacturing PET generates more than 100 times the toxic emissions compared to making the same amount of glass
- 800,000 metric tons of carbon equivalent are released in making about 50 million PET bottles
- up to seven times the amount of water in the bottle is used in processing
- in bottled water filtration, an estimated two gallons of water is wasted for every gallon
- shipping this heavy commodity from Europe and places as far away as Fiji

creates significant carbon dioxide emissions; trucking it throughout the U.S. consumes significant amounts of gasoline while generating damaging emissions

- some bottled water is shipped or stored cold, expending electricity for refrigeration
- 23% of PET plastic bottles were recycled in 2005, down from 40% in 1995
- recycled plastic bottles rarely contain more than 10% recycled plastic
- plastic bottle litter can take up to 1,000 years to biodegrade, if then
- incinerated with other trash, plastic releases toxic chlorine into the air while heavy metals deposit in the ash; plastic in landfills leak toxic additives such as phthalates into the groundwater
- some local streams and underground aquifers are becoming depleted through excessive withdrawal for large bottled water processing facilities
- it is estimated that 80% of mid-ocean flotsam was discarded on land, 90% of it being plastic

This column cannot begin to accommodate this topic, nor even a decent listing of resources. Google “bottled water environmental costs” or “environmental impact of PET plastic” for a great deal more information and discussion.

At this time of year when thoughts go to family and gift giving, perhaps we can broaden these concepts to include the family of man and mother Earth. Buy someone you love a stainless steel water bottle, get one for yourself too, and turn on the tap.

– *Karen L. Kish*

Christmas Bird Count

The CBC is the annual census of wintering bird populations that began in 1900. The results are used to estimate the distribution and abundance of wintering birds in North America. Each count circle covers an area 15 miles in diameter. Birders of all skill levels gather in teams

and identify and count all birds observed throughout the day. The results of the nation-wide census are compiled in the journal *North American Birds*.

Five CBC's are conducted locally: Carson City, Fallon, Pyramid Lake, South Lake Tahoe, and the Truckee Meadows, details below. For updated information on Christmas Bird Counts please see the LASweb site.

If you want to participate, contact the count leader or show up the morning of the count at the appointed location. Be sure to dress appropriately, and bring binoculars, field guides and scopes, and bring food and drink for the day. There is a \$5 fee for each participant to cover compiling and publishing costs of the *North American Birds* journal that reports all count results. Ask your count leader for details on how to receive the journal.

Local CBC's

Fallon

Saturday, December 22, 2007

Contact: Dan Rabbers at 775.423.4980 or by email: dan_rabbers@fws.gov. Meet at 7 a.m. at the USFWS Stillwater Refuge Office located at 1000 Auction Road, off Hwy 50. Areas to survey include Carson Lakes, Carson River, and adjacent agricultural lands. There will be an after count compilation party.

Truckee Meadows

Probably Saturday, Dec. 15

Contact: Dave McNinch, 775.747.7545. Please do not call after 9 p.m. Meet at the McDonald's on the corner of Oddie and Silverada (two blocks east of 395) in Sparks at 7 a.m. All count areas will be coordinated and teams dispersed from this location. A potluck is planned for the evening compiling session; time and place to be determined. Call Dave for details.

(CBC's continued on page 5)

CONSERVATION CORNER

Washoe County Open Space and Natural Resource Plan

Washoe County is currently updating their 1994 Open Space Plan for the southern portion of Washoe County. The plan will address a wide range of issues; include natural resource management, the urban interface, fire, cultural resources, trails and trail access, parks and acquisition. The plan update recognizes the current context of population growth, growing conflicts between users, higher costs of preserving open space, and the complex challenge of balancing the demands of conservation and development.

Many agency professionals and stakeholders have been working on this plan over the past year providing critical input on how open space and our natural resources in this area should be protected and managed in the future. For a plan of this importance and complexity to translate into an effective blueprint for action, key questions must be addressed such as/but not limited to: What areas do we protect as open space based on what values? How do we manage public use on the open space landscape to protect the qualities for which they are valued? How do we rank these values in order of importance? And, how to leverage the public involvement built into the process so the plan gets implemented on the ground? For example, our organization believes areas important to wildlife and that contribute to our quality of life such as Swan Lake NSA, mule deer wintering grounds, sage grouse leks and brood rearing areas, riparian areas and springs and seeps, just to name a few, should be identified in the plan and be protected by the county and other managing entities.

A public workshop was held in October where citizens previewed the draft plan and provided additional input. You can check out the plan on the county website and submit your comments or concerns to county staff. There is also a link to the plan on the LAS web site. Once the plan is in its

final version it needs to be presented to the County Commissioners for their approval, which County staff anticipates presenting in December 2007. We will post the commission meeting announcement on our website for those interested in attending. This is where your support of the plan is crucial. We need to convey the message that we value our open space and natural resources to the County Commissioners.

Hawken Fire Rehabilitation

LAS will be contributing to the rehabilitation efforts of the Hawken Fire that burned 2700 acres in July with money from our Conservation Fund. In cooperation with the Nevada Land Conservancy and Washoe County, we anticipate purchasing 300 small ponderosa and Jeffrey pine trees to plant in the burn area. We are also donating \$1000 toward seeding efforts that will be taking place this fall. The costs to rehabilitate this area are large, but every bit helps. This area was home to a variety of bird species including pinyon jays, nuthatches, white-crowned sparrows, scrub-jays, and California quail to name just a few. It's important that rehabilitation efforts occur sooner rather than later in order to keep invasive weeds at bay, to control erosion and to provide habitat once again for wildlife. We will be notifying our members of volunteer opportunities for this fire rehab effort through email and posting events on our website.

—Ali Chaney

Field Trip Reports

(continued from page 2)

Markleeville, September 16

Leader: Jim Woods

Jim Woods lead a wonderful trip at Grover Hot Springs this past Sunday! It was a beautiful day with deep blue skies and temperatures in the 70's. The seven of us had a great time trekking through forest and meadow with some very dramatic mountain views. Mike Goddard came in from Fallon to join us

and share his expertise. Highlights were White Headed Woodpecker, Red-breasted Sapsucker, American Dipper, Clark's Nutcracker, Black Phoebe, Williamson's Sapsucker, and a Warbling Vireo. Moving on to Pleasant Valley, we birded along the river. Highlights were a Hammond's Flycatcher, and a Sharp Shinned Hawk. There were also some good-sized Rainbow Trout moseying along the river. We wrapped up the day and went back to Markleeville where we indulged in good food, drinks, and great conversation. Thanks to you all for making it a special trip.

—Janet Hudson

Local CBC's

(continued from page 4)

Carson City

Sunday, December 16, 2007

Contact: Greg Scyphers at

775.745.3156 or scyph@sbcglobal.net

Meet at 7 a.m. at the McDonald's located at 3344N Carson Street at the North end of Carson. This is the one by the Bully's Sports Bar and the closed down K-Mart. The after count wrap-up spot is still to be determined. Changes and updates will be posted to the list serve.

South Lake Tahoe, CA

Date: TBA

Contact: Will Richardson,

530.412.2792 or

trichard@unr.nevada.edu.

Pyramid Lake

Tuesday, January 1, 2008

Contact: Dennis or Becca Serdehely at 775.575.0319, or birders@gbis.com.

Please do not call after 10 p.m. Meet at 7 a.m. at Crosby's Lodge in Suttcliff. Bring warm clothes, water, and lunch.

For information about out-of-area CBC's see the LAS web site. Areas include Elko, Snake Valley near Great Basin National Park, Honey Lake, Hart Mountain Wildlife Refuge in Oregon, and southern Nevada.

BIRDS IN TOWN

by Alan Wallace

With late-September snow dusting the mountain peaks, the slow-starting migration picked up steam and brought a number of decidedly non-Nevada birds to northern Nevada towns. To the delight of many birders, a **Palm Warbler** mingled with other warblers at Rancho San Rafael in Reno, a **Magnolia Warbler** briefly stopped at a bird bath in Fernley, and an immature **Sabine's Gull** soared around Virginia Lake in Reno, a far cry from its normal Alaskan to South Pacific haunts. Tonopah may want to think about holding a fall bird migration festival, given this year's **Clay-colored Sparrow**, **Baltimore Oriole**, **Lark** and **Lazuli Buntings**, **Northern Waterthrush**, **Lewis's Woodpecker**, and **Red-shouldered Hawk** (and always-excellent Miller's rest stop is just down the road).

On the more normal side of the migration, the regulars arrived and departed. The first **White-crowned Sparrows** arrived on September 17, followed a few days later by the **Golden-crowned Sparrows**. A few regular migrants drifted through towns, including **MacGillivray's**, **Orange-crowned**, **Wilson's**, and **Nashville Warblers**, as well as **Western Tanagers**, a few **Ospreys**, **Lewis's Woodpeckers**, **Yellow-breasted Chats**, and **Olive-sided, Willow**, and **Gray Flycatchers**, and one **Prairie Falcon** in suburban Sparks. Many summer breeders, such as **Black-headed Grosbeaks**, **Bullock's Orioles**, **Yellow Warblers**, and **Warbling Vireos**, slipped away towards their more temperate wintering grounds, leaving many woodlands and riparian areas notably quieter and less active in September. **Hooded Mergansers** winter in parts of northern Nevada and usually arrive in the middle of fall, but one early bird was sighted in Reno in late September. Hummingbirds continued to stick around, with a few **Anna's** and **Black-chinned Hummingbirds** staying into late September, but the **Rufous Hummingbirds** largely headed south by middle of the month. A few **Pine Siskins** visit feeders near Baker all summer and increase into the winter; in Unionville, they were absent all summer but descended on feeders *en masse* in mid September. The change in seasons induced some birds to descend from higher elevations, such as **Hermit Thrushes**, **Ruby-crowned Kinglets**, and one **Flammulated Owl**. A few birds, notably **Mourning Doves**, tried for one last fling at breeding, with fledglings leaving the nest in late August.

A pair of mid-summer **Red-breasted Nuthatches** in southwestern Reno, noted in the last column, apparently weren't just a local anomaly. Birders noted them elsewhere in Reno well into September, in the decidedly unusual habitats of Unionville and the Soldier Meadows B&B north of Gerlach, and in many equally odd parts of the West. Reports from southeastern Canada noted unusual dispersals of birds, including the nuthatches, that rely on conifer cone seeds, which were in short supply this year due to dry conditions in that region. With the dry winter and spring in the Sierras, a similar low seed crop, coupled with possible earlier and fewer hatches of insects, may have forced these normally montane birds to search for food wherever they could find it, such as lower-elevation towns and yards. The nuthatches that made it across some very forbidding desert to the B&B must have been pretty desperate to find dinner. These conditions also might explain the abundance of **Mountain Chickadees** in some parts of Reno through the summer, as well as the late-summer presence of **Evening Grosbeaks** at valley elevations. The dry conditions also led to some pretty lean pickings for waterfowl at in-town ponds and rivers, leaving vegetation instead of water in lake bottoms and only puddles along the nearly dry bed of the Humboldt River in Elko in late September.

With the busy backyard feeding season now upon us, it's a good time to clean out the feeders and feeding areas and disinfect them. Jacque Lowery also pointed out that many birds use nest boxes for winter roosts, so cleaning them out a bit would be a good idea as well.

For those of you who love lists, the updated master and bimonthly bird lists for this column, combining sightings since late 2001, are available on the LAS website. Thanks to Steve Ting for his nice job of formatting. Birders spotted 132 species in northern Nevada towns and yards in August and September. Sources of information for this column included **Brian Adams**, **John Anderson**, **Doug Booth**, **Richard Brune**, **Jack Cochran**, **Melody Craig**, **John Davis**, **Jim Eidel**, **John Free**, **Dennis Ghiglieri**, **Shawn Goodchild**, **Bob Goodman**, **Bill Hart**, **Linda Hiller**, **Martha Jones**, **Ed Kurtz**, **Jacque Lowery**, **Sue Anne Marshall**, **Martin Meyers**, **Jill Neumann**, **Kathy Oakes**, **Fred Petersen**, **Harold Peterson**, **Judy Phoenix**, **Debbie Pontius**, **Melissa Renfro**, **Greg Scyphers**, **Jean Sherman**, **Tom Stille**, **Rose Strickland**, **Jane Thompson**, **Myra Ulvang**, **Tom Ward**, **Dave Worley**, and me. Contributions are welcome, so send a postcard/note to 1050 Sumac St., Reno, NV 89509 or an email to wallacealan@sbcglobal.net, or continue to post items on the Nevada bird list-serve. The deadline for the next column is **November 25**. Good birding!

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November/December 2007 issue

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<i>A Birding Guide to Reno and Beyond--Second Edition</i> Published by Lahontan Audubon Society, 2007	\$10	\$2	_____
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Vice President	Alan Gubanich	aag@unr.nevada.edu	857-0191
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Seat #2 to 2008	<i>Vacant</i>		
Seat #3 to 2009	Ali Chaney	ali_chaney@hotmail.com	813-3494
Seat #4 to 2008	Kathy Oakes	oakesy@sbcglobal.net	747-5446
Seat #5 to 2009	Jacque Lowery	wbureno@sbcglobal.net	853-1302
Seat #6 to 2010	Linda Badzioch	lbadzioch@pyramid.net	851-8353
Seat #7 to 2010	Kenn Rohrs	karohrs@charter.net	849-9530

IBA

Director	Robin Powell	rpowell@audubon.org	247-2798
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COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Activity/Program	Alan Gubanich	aag@unr.nevada.edu	857-0191
Birding Classes	Bob Goodman	pandion36@aol.com	972-7848
Birds & Books Reading Group	Kenn Rohrs	karhors@charter.net	849-9530
Communications	Karen Kish	klkish@pyramid.net	841-1180
Conservation	Ali Chaney	ali_chaney@hotmail.com	813-3494
Education	Alan Gubanich	aag@unr.nevada.edu	857-0191
Field Trips	Christiane Omer	happycpo@aol.com	354-2634
Hospitality	Jane Burnham	jane.burnham@sbcglobal.net	677-4178
LAS Sales	Jane Burnham	jane.burnham@sbcglobal.net	677-4178
Membership	Kathy Oakes	oakesy@sbcglobal.net	747-5446

PUBLICATION AND INFORMATION

<i>The Pelican</i> Editor	Mike Greenan	mike@basicallywild.com	322-0707
<i>The Pelican</i> Distribution	Connie Douglas	nevadaconnie@sbcglobal.net	425-1305
"Birds in Town"	Alan Wallace	wallacealan@sbcglobal.net	786-5755
LAS Info Line	Jacque Lowery		324-BIRD
Web Master	Steve Ting	scting@charter.net	849-3725